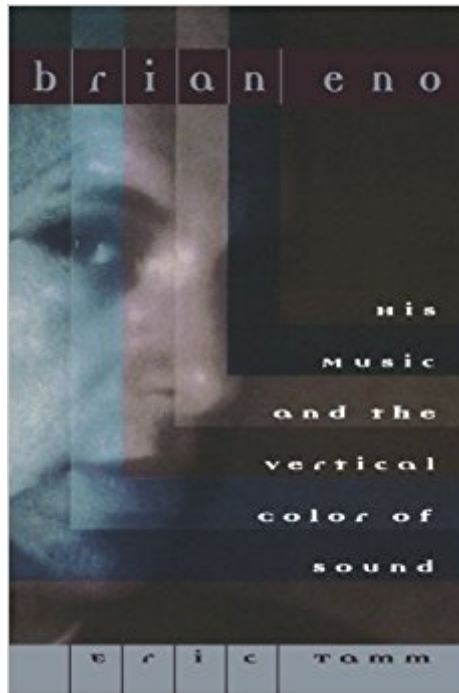


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Brian Eno: His Music And The Vertical Color Of Sound



Synopsis

Musician, composer, producer: Brian Eno is unique in contemporary music. Best known in recent years for producing U2's sensational albums, Eno began his career as a synthesizer player for Roxy Music. He has since released many solo albums, both rock and ambient, written music for film and television soundtracks, and collaborated with David Bowie, David Byrne, Robert Fripp, and classical and experimental composers. His pioneering ambient sound has been enormously influential, and without him today's rock would have a decidedly different sound. Drawing on Eno's own words to examine his influences and ideas, this book featuring a new afterword and an updated discography and bibliography will long remain provocative and definitive.

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Customer Reviews

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Eric Tamm earned his Ph.D. in music at the University of California, Berkeley, and has taught music history, theory, and piano at numerous Bay Area colleges and universities.

This book explores the music of Brian Eno from the perspective of a serious writer who is capable of giving the artist and his work proper context. Eric Tamm reveals Eno's place in popular and serious music from his early inspirations to how he has inspired so many others to this day. I became aware of Eno through his work with Roxy Music and followed his career onward. Tamm has documented his path with lots of references that are familiar as well as others which are new to me. The book is reminiscent and educational simultaneously. This book informatively reinforces and expands one's admiration for the works of Brian Eno.

I'd recommend this mostly for music students or anyone who wants to understand the diverse and interesting musical world of the 80s better. I like the way it talks about Eno; it's academic but not soulless, and the author loves the material but doesn't fangirl too hard. That's a bonus. On the negs, well, it's intricate. I wouldn't call that a bad thing, but I can't say it's a good 'light read'. Over all, though, I'd recommend it; it also got me to seek out Eno and think about music differently, and those are good things.

Most of the writing on music that is non-Classical or non-Jazz is done by hacks who just happened to buy enough albums as kids and have enough of a vocabulary to get jobs with music magazines. They possess no real knowledge of music outside of their own highly subjective and fickle opinions. No matter how much they seem to know they are still just fashion designers for the industry. In this case we have a serious "rock" musician taken seriously and analyzed seriously by a serious musicologist. The author demonstrates a knowledge of music outside of the pop/rock world and places Eno in this context. Short on biography, long on theory, this is a truly intelligent foray into the music of Brian Eno and is a shining example of what rock journalism could be. Alas, very few examples of "rock" musicians approach Eno in their worthiness of analysis.

Eno has long since attained quasi-mythical status in hip circles. Considered a, if not The, "Father of Ambient," he is a paragon for the all-black-wearing conceptual art school crowd. What most interests me as a sociologist is how Eno's reputation came about, when, he admits himself, he is responsible for "no breakthroughs" (pp. 172-173), and is more important as an influence than

someone whose records many people actually listen to. (For instance, I doubt if too many people in chill rooms at raves listen to Eno -- more likely it's the Orb, or FSOL, or the many others influenced by Terry Riley, Eno and others.) The thing is, I have been around long enough to remember Eno as the androgynous keyboard player for Roxy Music, and so I've seen him move from '70s prog-rock to Father of Ambient. Nice move! It seems to me that his position is based on two very different things: 1) fame by association, based on his collaborations and production of Bowie, the Talking Heads and U2, and 2) his late '70s move toward "ambient" on recordings such as MUSIC FOR AIRPORTS and ON LAND. Two crucial influences on Eno are Satie, who started an anti-romantic movement in music, and Cage, who saw himself as an "inventor" in the field of music, with no particular musical aptitude. Eno, likewise, strikes a minimalist posture in opposition to the excess of '70s prog-rock (ie, ELP, Yes), and a cool posture in opposition to the hot, angry punk movement. Anti-heroic and detached. So it seems to me that Eno has managed to succeed in an unusual way by working in the interstices between genres, and by refusing to be pigeonholed by any tendency. He has been in the right place at the right time, for instance, attaching himself to the Talking Heads and thus transitioning from the '70s to the '80s in style, and has known the right people. He keeps moving, keeps experimenting, and maintains tension between multiple positions. For instance, he minimizes emotion compared to much conventional pop, but tries to maintain a "seductive" prettiness (p. 174) compared to the dry formalism of the avant-garde. He's avant-garde, but also a populist! A fascinating element that Tamm reveals is Eno's technical proficiency, and deliberate use of mechanical "glitches" to produce unique sounds. Tamm apparently wrote this originally as a Ph.D thesis -- I wonder how many dissertations there are by now on Eno? At least as edited for DaCapo, it is an excellent work of musical scholarship. In particular, Tamm does a superb job of using direct quotes from Eno to make his main points. If you're at all interested in Eno, Tamm's book is well worth reading.

Since very little is known of Eno's private life, this book takes a pretty good and professional look at his composing life, starting with Roxy Music and up to about 1990. The most interesting aspects are the clear explanations of Eno's techniques and concepts. I found many of the ideas and thoughts applicable to other art forms, and am using some of the ideas for work of my own now. Be warned that the book does assume the reader has a certain level of understanding of music theory and contemporary music, but there is still much to enjoy if you are a newcomer to these ideas.

This is a fun and excellent book, it details the work of musician Brian Eno and his work in relation to

other musicians who were part of progressive and psychedelic rock in the 1960s and 1970s

The oblique views of the most famous non-musician at work. In which we are introduced to the frog vision concept, Erik Satie's musique d'ameublement, John Cage's sound pictures and of course Eno's own conceptual continuity. Never a dull moment within the realms of minimalism ? Yes, you read right. Clever, smart, and appealing.

Though this book is written more from a technical perspective, it provides interesting insights into the fertile, creative mind of Brian Eno. I would not recommend this book to anyone who doesn't have interest in musicology or the technical nature of music creation. However, for those who are interested, feast away.

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